

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-02 INR-07 H-02 HA-05 L-03 /034 W
-----001447 122339Z /41

P R 122140Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO USINFO WASHDC PRIORITY
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 6621

UNCLAS SECTION 1 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 00171

FOR IOP IPS IBS ILA STATE FOR ARA/CEN

E.O. 11652: N/A

UNCLAS. JANUARY 12. THE FOLLOWING IS THE TRANSCRIPT OF THE
INFORMAL PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY CONGRESSMAN FATHER
ROBERT DRINAN AT SALON DE LOS HEROES, HOTEL CAMINO REAL, SAN
SALVADOR. FIFTEEN MEDIA REPRESENTATIVES ATTENDED THE
CONFERENCE. LA PRENSA GRAFICA PUBLISHED AN EXTENSIVE REPORT
IN TODAY'S EDITION.

THAT DRINAN: THANK YOU ALL FOR COMING HERE. FIRST, LET
ME TELL YOU WHAT WE HAVE SEEN DURING OUR DAYS IN THIS
BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY. I TALKED FOR OVER AN HOUR WITH THE PRESIDENT
YESTERDAY. I ALSO SPOKE WITH THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR ALMOST
AN HOUR. WE HAD EXTENSIVE CONVERSATIONS WITH ARCHBISHOP ROMERO,
THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, AND THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE.
I ALSO SPOKE WITH A GROUP OF AMERICAN PRIESTS AND NUNS,
AND WITH SEVERAL JESUIT OFFICIALS. MOST IMPORTANTLY,
HOWEVER, WE HAD EXTENSIVE CONTACT WITH MANY GROUPS OF
CAMPEsinOS. WE ALSO SPOKE WITH A LARGE GROUP OF LABOR UNION
REPRESENTATIVES AND WITH MEMBERS OF THE PRESS. I WANT TO
TALK ABOUT A REPRESSION, A PATTERN OF REPRESSION THAT WE
FOUND AMONG CATHOLICS, AND ESPECIALLY AMONG CATHOLIC
CAMPEsinOS. IT IS TRUE THAT NO PRIEST HAS BEEN MURDERED AND
NO PRIEST EXPELLED SINCE JULY 1. AT THE SAME TIME, IT
APPEARS, UNFORTUNATELY, THAT A MORE SUBTLE FORM OF REPRESSION
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AND INTIMIDATION OF RELIGION IS PERVASIVE IN THIS COUNTRY.
THE CAMPEsinOS ARE VERY TERRIFIED OF PRACTICING THEIR RELIGION.
LAST EVENING, ANOTHER PRIEST AND I CELEBRATED A MASS IN WHAT
WAS LITERALLY LIKE THE CATACOMBS BECAUSE THESE PEOPLE ARE
AFRAID TO HAVE MASS IN PUBLIC. COUNTLESS PEOPLE TOLD US
THAT THE ORDEN (ORGANIZACION DEMOCRATICA NACIONALISTA)
WARNED THEM NOT TO HAVE A CATHOLIC BIBLE PRESENT OR TO LISTEN

TO THE CATHOLIC RADIO PROGRAM. THIS REPRESSION OF RELIGION IS TIED IN AND INSEPARABLE FROM A SYSTEMATIC INTIMIDATION OF PEASANTS AND OF THE BASIC RIGHTS OF PEOPLE TO ASSEMBLE TOGETHER.

YESTERDAY, WE HEARD FOR ALMOST FOUR HOURS TWENTY-TWO SEPARATE STORIES OF KILLINGS, DISAPPEARANCES, PROVEN BRUTALITY, AND RAPES. THIS REPRESSION OF PEASANTS IS TIED IN AND IS INSEPARABLE FROM THE REPRESSION OF RELIGION. A DEFAMATION OF PRIESTS AS SUBVERSIVES IS AN ACT OF THE GOVERNMENT THAT IS PERVERSIVE AND UNIVERSAL. YESTERDAY, WE WENT TO THE TOMB OF FATHER GRANDE, A MARTYR AS OF MARCH 12 LAST YEAR. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HIS MURDER WAS A DELIBERATE ACT OF THE GOVERNMENT TO PREVENT THE CAMPESINOS FROM ORGANIZING AND LISTENING TO PRIESTS ABOUT THE SOCIAL RIGHTS OF PEASANTS. ADDITIONALLY, THE GOVERNMENT IS INVOLVED IN A SYSTEMATIC ATTEMPT TO DIVIDE THE CHURCH. IN ADDITION TO THE TWO GROUPS MENTIONED, NAMEDLY RELIGIOUS GROUPS AND CAMPESINOS, WE SPOKE TO A VERY LARGE NUMBER OF LABOR UNION OFFICIALS. UNANIMOUSLY, WITHOUT DISSENT, ALL OF THESE INDIVIDUALS STATED THAT THERE IS MORE REPRESSION OF LABOR UNIONS AFTER JULY 1 THAN BEFORE. A FOURTH PROBLEM THAT WE HAVE EXPLORED IS THE LACK OF FREEDOM IN THE PRESS. WE SPOKE WITH THE ONE EDITOR OF A PAPER THAT IS NOT CONTROLLED BY THE GOVERNMENT. IT IS OBVIOUSLY CLEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT CONTROLS THE THOUGHT AND THE TRUTH OF THIS COUNTRY. THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES WILL BE MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS CONCERNING UNCLASSIFIED

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THE EXISTENCE OR NON-EXISTENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN EL SALVADOR. THE CONGRESS HAS ALREADY CONDUCTED TWO SETS OF HEARINGS ON EL SALVADOR, ONE ON RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION, THE OTHER ON FRAUD IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. I REGRET TO SAY THAT MY CONCLUSION, AS A MEMBER OF CONGRESS, IS THAT THIS GOVERNMENT HAS NOT DISASSOCIATED ITSELF, IN FACT, FROM THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT AND THAT THAT IS GOVERNMENT IS ENGAGED IN A PROGRAM OF THE SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION OF PEASANTS, AND IS DOING SO BY DEFAMING THE PRIESTS OF THIS COUNTRY AND TELLING PEASANTS TO HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM. THE SUBSTRUCTURE OF REPRESSION IS CARRIED OUT BY MAINTAINING CONTROL OVER THE LABOR UNIONS AND THE PRESS, AND IT WOULD SEEM THAT THE MINIMUM INTERNATIONALLY GUARANTEED HUMAN RIGHTS ARE NOT BEING OBSERVED IN EL SALVADOR. WITH REGARD TO SOME SPECIFICS, HOWEVER, WE HAVE OBTAINED COMMITMENTS FROM THIS GOVERNMENT. THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR HAS STATED THAT HE WOULD RE-EXAMINE ZG WILF VION FROM ANY PRIEST EXPELLED FROM EL SALVADOR. THE MINISTER OF INTERIOR HAS ALSO STATED THAT AMERICAN PRIESTS AND RELIGIOUS EVERYONE IN THIS COUNTRY, WILL RECEIVE MULTIPLE VISAS UPON REQUEST. THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR ALSO STATED THAT HE

WOULD WELCOME ANY INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT EVERYONE STATES IS A WIDESPREAD PRACTICE, NAMELY, THE OPENING OF THE MAIL COMING TO EL SALVADOR FROM THE OUTSIDE.

ADDITIONALLY, THE PRESIDENT OF EL SALVADOR HAS STATED THAT HE WILL INVESTIGATE A MAN SUSPECTED OF KILLING FATHER GRANDE. I THINK THAT WE HAVE PRODDED OFFICIALS IN THIS COUNTRY TO THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS PEOPLE, OR THE PERSECUTION OF POOR PEOPLE WHO WANT TO BE RELIGIOUS, THE IMPLICATIONS OF THAT IN AMERICA AND ACROSS THE WORLD.

THE GOOD FAITH OF THIS GOVERNMENT WILL BE TESTED BY ITS REACTION TO UR REQUEST FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF BENITO ESTRADA, OF PAISNAL. THE GOOD FAITH OF THIS GOVERNMENT WILL ALSO BE TESTED BY SEVERAL REQUESTS THAT WE WILL BE SENDING.

I WILL BE HAPPY TO RESPOND TO ANY QUESTIONS, OJFMAYBE ONE OR
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MORE OF MY COMPANIONS WILL WANT TO ADD SOME OBSERVATIONS. JOHN J. MRNAWARD (ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE): I WOULD LIKE TO CLARIFY WHAT REPRESENTATIVE DRINAN WAS TALKING ABOUT WITH RESPECT TO BENITO ESTRADA. HE HAS BEEN ACCUSED OF BEING INVOLVED IN THE DEATH OF FATHER RUTILIO GRANDE. A JUDGE ISSUED AN ORDER FOR HIS ARREST, AND TO THIS DAY, THIS PERSON CAN BE SEEN WALKING IN EL PAISNAL. ONE OF OUR OTHER PREOCCUPATIONS THAT WE HAD DURING THE VISIT WAS THE SYSTEMATIC REPRESSION THAT WE OBSERVED WITH RESPECT TO THOSE WHO WERE ACCUSED OF BEING MEMBERS OF UTC OR FECCAS. EVEN VICE PRESIDENT ASTACIO WAS NOT ABLE TO ANSWER MY QUESTION WHEN I ASKED HIM WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN ORGANIZATION LIKE ORDEN OR FARO, BOTH OF WHICH, I UNDERSTAND, DO NOT HAVE "PERSONERIA JURIDICA," AND FECCAS AND UTC.

I ALSO NOTED THAT THERE SEEMS TO BE A CONFLICT BETWEEN THE CONSTITUTION OF EL SALVADOR AND THE WORK (LABOR) CODE. THE CONSTITUTION SEEMS TO GIVE THE RIGHT TO EVERY SALVADORAN TO ORGANIZE HIMSELF OR HERSELF IN A UNION. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE CODE SEEMS TO SAY THAT 62 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION IN THE RURAL AREA DO NOT HAVE THIS HUMAN RIGHT. THERE APPEARS TO BE A BASIC CONFLICT IN THE STATUTES OF THE INTER-AMERICAN COVENANT ON HUMAN RIGHTS WHICH EL SALVADOR SIGNED MANY YEARS AGO.

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PA-02 INR-07 H-02 HA-05 L-03 /034 W
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P R 122140Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO USINFO WASHDC PRIORITY
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UNCLAS SECTION 2 OF 2 SAN SALVADOR 00171

FOR IOP IPS IBS IWH STATENKOR ARA/CEN

WE ALSO ARE AWAITING, HOPEFULLY THROUGH THE GOOD OFFICES
OF THE MINISTER OF THE INTERIOR, THE OFFICIAL RESULTS,
"MUNICIPIO POR MUNICIPIO," OF THE 1974, 1976, AND 1977 NATIONAL
ELECTIONS.

DR. JOSE NAPOLEON GONZALEZ, DIRECTOR, LA CRONICA DEL PUEBLO
(TRANSLATION): MY QUESTION IS WHETHER AMONG THE OBSERVATIONS
THAT THE CONGRESSMAN (DRINAN) OR THE KY43 , YOU HAVE
INCLUDED A RECOMMENDATION FOR THE DEROGATION OF THE "LEY
DEL ORDEN PUBLICO," WHICH CONTAINS SERIOUS LIMITATIONS TO
FREEDOM OF THOUGHT, AND WHICH IN ADDITION CONSTITUTES A GROSS
ABUSE OF THE CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC. AS AN INDEPENDENT
NEWSPAPERMAN OF THIS COUNTRY, I CONSIDER THAT THIS LAW,
WITHOUT ANY DOUBT, IS A GROSS VIOLATION, BOTH IN DOCTRINALLY
AND PHILOSOPHICAL TERMS, OF THE ESSENCE OF HUMAN RIGHTS.
FATHER DRINAN: THIS LAW OF NOVEMBER 25 IS WORSE THAN THE
STATE OF SIEGE. IT VIOLATES SEVERAL OF THE GUARANTEES OF
THE UNITED NATIONS DECLARATIONS ON HUMAN RIGHTS. MOSENOR
ROMERO AND MANY OTHERS HAVE PROTESTED ITS EXISTENCE AND
ITS APPLICATION. I THINK THAT THE CONTINUED EXISTENCE OF THIS
LAW MAY WELL MEAN THAT ALL UNITED STATES AID TO EL SALVADOR
WILL BE CUT.

GUILLERMO DELEON - TV NEWS, CHANNEL 2 (TRANSLATION): I BELIEVE
THE QUESTION I WANTED TO ASK HAS ALREADY BEEN ANSWERED.
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I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT WOULD BE THE SANCTIONS TO BE IMPOSED ON
SALVADOR. YOU HAVE ALREADY REPLIED TO IT BY STATING THAT ALL
ECONOMIC AID WILL BE SUSPENDED.

FATHER DRINAN: IF I MAY RESPOND BY BRINGING IN ANOTHER
ISSUE: I NEGLECTED TO RELATE THAT WE MET WITH THE HIGHEST
OFFICIALS OF THE OPPOSITION PARTIES. THE REPORT OF THE HEARINGS
IN THE CONGRESS HAS 93 FULL PAGES AND NO ONE DEFENDED THE
ELECTION. SOME PEOPLE SUGGEST AHT GENERAL ROMERO WOULD HAVE WON

ANYWAY. BUT THAT IS NOT CERTAIN AT ALL. MANY PEOPLE IN THE UNITED STATES STATE THAT HE IS NOT A LEGALLY ELECTED PRESIDENT OF THIS COUNTRY. THIS CLEARLY RAISES A SUBSTANTIAL QUESTION OF COMPLIANCE WITH BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS, THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN THEIR GOVERNMENT.

RENE CONTRERAS - REPORTER, ACAN-EFE--CENTRAL AMERICAN NEWS AGENCY. (TRANSLATION): FROM THE INFORMATION YOU HAVE OBTAINED IN YOUR DIFFERENT INTERVIEWS, COULD YOU GIVE US AN EXACT FIGURE ON THE NUMBER OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE COUNTRY?

FATHER DRINAN: THE PRESIDENT AND OTHERS DENY THAT POLITICAL PRISONERS, AS SUCH, EXIST. BUT, IT SEEMS THAT HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN KILLED BECAUSE THEY ARE POLITICAL DISSIDENTS. IN ADDITION, FURTHER HUNDREDS OR THOUSANDS SIMPLY DISAPPEAR. IN THE MONTH OF DECEMBER, 1977, THE NATIONAL GUARD DETAINED 2,268 PEOPLE. IN THIS MONTH (DECEMBER), THERE ARE 4,024 INMATES IN THE NATIONAL PENITENTIARIES. OFFICIALS WOULD NOT TELL US HOW MANY PEOPLE THE NATIONAL POLICE DETAIN EACH MONTH. OFFICIALS WERE NOT CANDID OR FORTHCOMING IN THIS CRUCIAL POINT.

JOHN MCAWARD: I WOULD LIKE TO ADD THAT THIS GOVERNMENT SPEAKS OF SEDITION AND SUBVERSION. ACCORDING TO THE MINISTRY OF JUSTICE, THERE IS NOT ONE SALVADORAN PRISONER IN THIS COUNTRY TODAY WHO HAS BEEN CHARGED OR IS IN JAIL BECAUSE OF SEDITION OR SUBVERSION.

FATHER DRINAN: I AM GOING TO ASK AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL TO UNCLASSIFIED

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MAKE ADDITIONAL INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DISAPPEARED, WHEN THE REASON FOR THEIR DISAPPEARANCE IS CLEARLY POLITICAL.

I THANK YOU AGAIN. WE'LL BE HERE IF YOU HAVE ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS.

ROBERTO ALVAREZ - OAS (TRANSLATION): GOING FURTHER INTO THE QUESTION OF POLITICAL PRISONERS IN THE COUNTRY, FATHER DRINAN SAID THAT THE AUTHORITIES DID NOT WANT TO INFORM HIM ABOUT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE DETAINED EACH MONTH.

FATHER DRINAN: TAKEN PRISONER NOT BY THE NATIONAL GUARD BUT BY THE NATIONAL POLICE.

ROBERTO ALVAREZ (TRANSLATION) MY QUESTION IS AS FOLLOWS: HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO OBTAIN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE DETAINED IN THE COUNTRY, POLITICAL OR OTHERWISE?

FATHER DRINAN: NO. I GAVE TWO NUMBERS: THERE ARE 4,024 PRISONERS IN NINE PENITENTIARIES. IN DECEMBER 1977, THE NATIONAL GUARD DETAINED 2,268, BUT WE DO NOT KNOW THE KEY QUESTION, "HOW MANY DID THE NATIONAL POLICE DETAIN IN THE RECENT PAST?"

JOHN MCAWARD: I WOULD LIKE TO ADD SOMETHING TO THAT. WE TOLD THE MINISTER OF JUSTICE THAT WE WERE LEAVING TOMORROW MORNING FOR THE UNITED STATES. WE WERE UNABLE TO GET AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE MINISTER OF DEFENSE. AS A MEMBER OF

THE CABINET, WE ASKED HIM TO PLEASE CALL THE MINISTER OF
DEFENSE TO ASK HOW MANY PRISONERS THE NATIONAL GUARD, THE
NATIONAL POLICE, THE NACIENDA POLICE AND THE ADUANA POLICE
WERE HOLDING IN THEIR JAILS. HE SAID THAT HE WAS UNABLE TO
DO THIS, THAT IT WASN'T AN ORDINARY REQUEST. WE TOLD HIM
THAT IN OUR COUNTRY, AND IN MOST... IN EVERY FREE COUNTRY OF
THE WORLD, THE OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR PRISONS
ARE ABLE TO TELL ANYONE HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE CURRENTLY DETAINED.
WE ARE RETURNING TO THE UNITED STATES AND WE WILL HAVE TO TELL
THE AMERICAN PUBLIC THAT THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT WAS UNABLE
TO PROVIDE THIS DATE TO US.

FATHER DRINAN: GRACIAS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 12 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978SANSAA00171
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: n/a
Expiration:
Film Number: D780019-0308
Format: TEL
From: SAN SALVADOR
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780169/aaaacgef.tel
Line Count: 297
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 8137fce3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 6
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 07 feb 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3782784
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CHANGED> VJT 20040818
Subject: TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS CONFERENCE GIVEN BY CONGRESSMAN FATHER ROBERT DRINAN AT SALON DE LOS HEROES
TAGS: SOPN, ES, (DRINAN, ROBERT)
To: USIA
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/8137fce3-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014